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ABSTRACT

Foreign students in American universities need to attain proficiency in English as a Second Language (ESL) as well as knowledge of American cultural and economic life in order to pursue further training in other fields of study. An examination of the needs of foreign students who are deficient in English language skills indicates that a developmental English class designed to remedy deficiencies among native English-speaking students will not meet the needs of the foreign student. This would seem to be the case because of divergence in intuitive, semantic, and cultural knowledge between the ESL student and the native speaker. The answer to the question of how ESL students are to be taught may lie in the nature of the teacher training program. The prospective teacher should have taken courses in methodology with broad bases in linguistics, education, and English, as well as in culture. Equally important is a feeling for and love of language which the teacher must transmit to students. (AMH)

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"BUT IT'S ENGLISH, ISN'T IT?" TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AND/OR DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH -- SAME METHODS?

by

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"BUT IT'S ENGLISH, ISN'T IT?" TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AND/OR DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH -- SAME METHODS?

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SYLVIA LANE

Recently in a reading and writing class for foreign students I received a composition which read in part:

> If I get lost and need to ask for directions to solve this problem, how could I find my way again? I have to depend on myself.

My student is Japanese and her feeling of alientation is significant. Her choice of expression, "How could I find my way again?" may well pictorialize a world where doubt is now a preoccupation.

Adjustment to the reality of a new language and culture IS a major problem for any of us. Away from home, friends, culture and native language, the foreign student may well find the new reality overwhelming.

As ESL teachers, how can we help the adjustment? The task burgeons as the numbers of foreign students increase yearly. One authority estimates that by 1990 we may well have a million foreign students entering the country each year.[1] Our students are coming from the developing countries of Africa and Asia as well as from the more familiar areas of the Middle East and Latin America and the Orient. The goal is a prestigious degree and the field of study may be engineering, business management, natural and life sciences, education and computer

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[1] The Chronicle of Higher Education, "One Million Foreign Students at U.S. Colleges, Triple Present Number, Seen Likely by 1990." Vol. XXIII, No. 8, October 21, 1981, p. 1.

science among others.

In the variety of studies open to the foreign student, however, a foundational subject links every student to one program -- the study of English as a second language. Our foreign student cannot function at any level in the American school system without competency in the four important skill areas of English -- reading, writing, listening and speaking.[2] And even beyond the university, more than likely these skills will be an important factor in the student's professional success, especially if he returns to his country to work in his profession as a bilingual speaker of English.

Linguistically and culturally our students are widely divergent. Our student may be monolingual, proficient only in his native language, or if he comes from a country like Poland he may know Russian in addition to Polish, or if he comes from Aruba he may be indeed multilingual and speak Papiamento, Spanish, Dutch and French.

Culturally, he may come from a tiny village in Mali or a metropolis like Tokyo. He may be married or single, young or old, Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim or atheist.

The range of English proficiencies among these students may show the same kind of wide variation. Students high in English abilities may enroll in college courses without

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[2] Rebecca M. Valette, Modern Language Testing (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), p. 314

need for remedial classes. Other students may be categorized in English skills as follows:

1. Students who speak well but cannot read or write proficiently
2. Students who read and write well but cannot speak proficiently
3. Students who cannot read, write or speak proficiently

All these deficiencies may be related to first language interference, past schooling, the student's own abilities and his own contact with English speakers. Thus we may have a Japanese student who can read and write English with reasonable proficiency but who has not mastered English phonology because of little contact with English speakers. On the other hand, a Lebanese student who has dealt with American and English tourists may comprehend and speak English with ease but may have little proficiency in reading and writing English.

These students may have TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)scores which may be borderline or even above college acceptance levels. But the TOEFL score may not be the best indicator of specific abilities or may in fact overlook a range of deficiencies in English skills. Or a particular talent in some student might in some schools warrant relaxation or even waiver of minimal scores.

Yet the student needs to achieve English competency skills swiftly if he is to survive. Compounding his problem may be the fact that his skills in other areas

such as mathematics or science may be in inverse ratio to his proficiency in English. To pursue further training in a field where he may already have an advanced degree, he must reach in a comparatively short time a range of English skills so that he can take his place in the college class with native speakers of English.

In addition, closely related to our foreign student's need for English proficiency is his need for cultural adaptation. Learning a culture and learning a language are so closely entwined that it seems clear the areas are interdependent. Cultural adaptation includes knowledge of specific vocabulary and perceptions of American social and economic life. It includes introduction not only to the day-to-day mechanics of the social relationship but also recognition of the broad range of American style in political structure, work ethic, social roles, interpersonal and family relationships.

How can we help our foreign students achieve this proficiency?

At first glance, it would appear that the place for students having problems in English grammar and reading comprehension might be in the Developmental English classes prevalent in many college campuses today.

The Developmental English class, or English Lab, or English Workshop or some other euphemism, is a rather

recent development on the American college campus, the rise perhaps correlating with the decline in verbal skills measured by the Scholastic Aptitude Test scores for college-bound high school seniors. The trend now seems to be stabilizing but it appears that the Developmental English class will continue to focus on reading and writing skills. Let me quote a course description for one of these classes at a local university:

> A basic skills course with primary concern of grammatical accuracy, variety in vocabulary, sentence structure and paragraph development, stress on range of student's self-understanding and self expression

At first glance it would appear that this type course might be admirably suited to the needs of the foreign student. Here we have a class devoted to teaching English writing skills. We have foreign students with this very need. It would appear the solution to the problem is obvious.

However, a closer look at the needs of the foreign student may provide us with another assessment.

In this paper I propose to examine the needs of the foreign student who is deficient in English reading and writing skills. I propose to contrast these needs with the needs of the American student in Developmental English. My contention is that the ESL student may find himself totally lost in a Developmental English class

geared to the needs of the native speaker. My argument will be that American students of whatever dialect or background share an internalized cognitive and semantic frame which the second language learner must acquire externally. That is, the skills and knowledge already within the framework of the American speaker must be presented to and consciously learned by the foreign speaker of English.

In this argument I will use the terms ESL student and foreign student interchangeably and the terms American student, Developmental student and native speaker interchangeably, for purposes of this paper.

The question I would like to address concerns the pedagogical challenge facing the teacher of the ESL student. I would define the question as two-fold:

1. What are the needs assessments of the foreign student?
2. How shall the foreign student be taught?

In contrasting the ESL student to the Developmental student, I find three areas of divergence:

1. Intuitive knowledge
2. Semantics knowledge
3. Cultural knowledge

By intuitive knowledge I mean that set of internalized knowledge about a language formed without conscious

awareness as in the case of the native speaker. Involuntary acquisition includes the range of cognition about structure, syntax and grammar learned in acquisition of a natural language. My belief is that for the most part, regardless of the particular variety of standard, nonstandard or substandard dialect, the native speaker of English needs little or no further development of skills in parts of this cognitive area.

I will define the cognitive area by eleven classifications, representative of many more categories of this kind.

For purposes of this paper, excerpts of writing which illustrate these classifications were taken at random from compositions by foreign students in my class of Foreign English Advanced Writing and Reading. The excerpts were presented to American students in a Developmental English class who were given the following options:

As an English speaker, I would not change this _____

As an English speaker, I would change this to _____

The results which follow show that the classifications present no problems for the Developmental student who is a native speaker of English. For the ESL student, however, the classifications present serious problems.

[3]SEQUENCE OF ADJECTIVES IN A NOUN PHRASE

Adjectives which precede a noun in a noun phrase follow a fixed order. That is, the sequence begins with a partitive or demonstrative or possessive (the, that, John's), followed by ordinals (first), general description (noisy), physical description (young), proper adjectives (Catholic), and noun adjunct (college student) just before the noun head.

STUDENT WRITING

American: poor, old, unhappy Indian woman
Chinese: Indian, unhappy, old, poor woman

COMPLEMENT OF VERB - OBJECT SLOT

A noun completes the predication after the verb. This can be the direct object which is placed after the verb.

STUDENT WRITING

American: He knows Bob very well.
Greek: He knows very well Bob.

TWO-WORD VERB (SEPARABLE)

The verb plus prepositional particle (two-word verb) or verb plus noun plus prepositional particle (separable two word verb) may be part of an idiom.

STUDENT WRITING

American: Call him up.
Japanese: Call up him.

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[3]Traditional grammar and definitions summarized from Modern English by Marcella Frank, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1972)

INDEFINITE PRONOUN AND SINGULAR VERB

Indefinite pronouns (something, anything, nothing, everything) are singular in form and take a singular verb.

STUDENT WRITING

American: Everything is very expensive.
Korean: Everythings are very expensive.

MODAL AND INFINITIVE FORM OF THE VERB

The modal auxiliary (shall, will can, must) is joined with the infinitive form of the verb in the present tense.

STUDENT WRITING

American: We can classify
Hebrew: We can classified

NON-FINITE VERBS

Non-finite verbs consist of infinitive forms (to plus the infinitive form of the verb) and the participial - ing or -ed forms. When used as a noun, the participial -ing form is called a gerund.

STUDENT WRITING

American: I want to go there.
Spanish: I want for to go there.
Arabic: I want to going there.

CORRELATIVE CONJUNCTION - NOT ONLY, BUT ALSO

When and, or, but join coordinate elements, the first item may also be preceded by a conjunction. In the correlative pair not only, but also the omission of

also places greater emphasis on the second element.

STUDENT WRITING

American: Not only you but I will go.
Chinese: Not only you will go but also will I.

ARTICLE - THE and A

Semantic and structural factors determine the use articles. These factors relate to:

1. whether the noun head is singular, plural or countable
2. whether the referent is familiar or unfamiliar to the speaker
3. whether the noun head has general or specific application
4. whether the noun head has a classifying function
5. whether the noun head has a post-modifier

STUDENT WRITING

American: The bomb dropped on Japan and stopped World War II.
Japanese: Bomb dropped on the Japan and stopped the World War II.

NEGATION - NO USED AS AN ADJECTIVE

Negation may be expressed by using no with a noun.

STUDENT WRITING

American: They have no milk.
Indonesian: They have none milk.

QUESTION FORMATION

There are three kinds of questions in English - simple questions which can be answered yes or no only, interrogative-word questions (using who, what, where), and tag questions. Tag questions consist of two parts. The first

part contains the regular question auxiliary plus the personal pronoun that stands for the subject. If the statement part of the question is positive, the question part is negative; if the statement part is negative, the question part is positive.

STUDENT WRITING

American: We are Americans, aren't we?
We aren't animals, are we?
Chinese: We don't be animals, being we not?

NEGATION

Except when single forms of <u>be</u> are involved, all negatives operate with auxiliaries. In negation, <u>not</u> is inserted after the first auxiliary. (The ESL speaker must learn the position of the negative marker.)

STUDENT WRITING

American: The car doesn't need much gas.
German: The car needs not much gas.

SEMANTICS

The second area of divergence I find between the foreign student and the native speaker is in understanding the semantics of English, what Postman and Weingartner call "semantic awareness".[4] To put it simplistically, semantics has to do with meaning, the way we interpret language. We bring a range of emotional connotation to the meaning we give a word because we give meaning to a word from our experience. Meaning is in people, not in the word -- "the word is not the thing".

My contention is that semantic awareness of the range of connotation in a word is implicit in the perceptions of the native speaker of English. The ESL student must be made aware of these connotations. Very possibly in learning the range of connotations, the ESL student will find differences of interpretation, and even oppositions, in his own semantic categories.

For example, the native speaker and the foreign student may have a different response to the connotations of the words communism, socialism and capitalism. We label systems with names to which we program response.

Socially, the native speaker understands the subtle distinctions of various attributive adjectives -- for instance, the differences between compliment and insult in the range of physical description. He knows the distinctions

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[4] Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, Linguistics (New York: Dell, 1978), p. 137

between plump, fat, stout, heavy; curvacious, "built"; slim, thin, skinny and the connotations implied in usage.

The native speaker knows the idifferences between similar sounding patterning in English. Someone who cleans the house may be a housecleaner, But someone who walks the streets is not a streetwalker. And someone who walks in the street is doing something else.

He knows that being kin to someone may mean he has kinship with him, but being related to someone does not mean he has a relationship with him.

He understands the pragmatics within meaning. That is, he can explain differences of identical patterning in terms of context of usage. The native speaker knows the differences in variety, including: (1) Measles is going around. (2) John and Mary are going around. (3) My head is going around. (4) The earth is going around.

He understands the idiom and metaphor which is so much a part of our language in daily usage. For example, the native speaker understands terms like work like a dog and work around the clock.

The foreign student must learn this usage through classroom teaching.

In this context, I will give an example which occurred in my reading class. In one of our readings, to describe

the gradual deterioration of a character, the author wrote, "The sparkle in his eye died." The interpretation of my foreign students was simple and direct. "Hard work made him blind in one eye."

CULTURE

The third area where I find divergence between the American student and the foreign student relates to knowledge of American culture.

Within that cultural knowledge I place implicit understanding of American national holidays, customs, interpersonal relations and perceptions formed by shared history.

For instance, a foreign student from a non-Christian country may not know vocabulary the American student relates to Christmas such as "Santa's bag", "Noel", "hang up your stockings", "Christmas cards", "Christmas list", "Christmas Club", "white Christmas" -- even "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer". He may need explanation of the significance of rabbits and eggs in relation to the celebration of Easter. If we describe a turkey and all the trimmings, he may ask how a turkey is trimmed, and he may also need to learn what a turkey is.

Within the area of interpersonal relations, the foreign student may need to learn a range of rules already understood by the native speaker. He may need to learn

the subtleties of the rules of the dating game or the rules of what we consider proprieties in social conduct or the the signals of "leavetaking" procedures. For instance, I will repeat the well-known example that in France men may walk arm in arm on the street but in this country such conduct is socially disapproved.

"Leavetaking" procedures involve the signals we recognize as indication that a meeting is over. Students from cultures where direct eye contact is considered impolite may have to learn to recognize the range of eye-to-eye glances significant in American interaction. In addition, American leavetaking procedures involve kinesic or body movement actions such as body shifts in a chair, and paralinguistic or intonational elements which overlay utterance such as significant intonation of a word like "okay" or "that's it".

In this connection, I would like to comment on the role paralinguistics, that is voice inflection and stress, plays in understanding meaning. Garvin points out that "individuals who speak a foreign language commit easily recognizable errors of intonation and emotional expression which indicate that the elements of intonation and paralinguistics are not universal but specific to a particular language."[5]

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[5] Paul L. Garvin, "The Teaching of a Second Language at the Advanced Level", English version of article published in the Proceedings of the 1st Canadian Symposium on Applied Linguistics, May, 1969, at the University of Ottawa.

To this, I will add my belief that in English the paralinguistic elements which indicate surprise, sarcasm and irritation may be obvious to the native speaker but not understood by the ESL learner.

As an example, an American bus driver may appear to be courteous to the foreign student when he tells him "Take your time" with exaggerated smile and soft voice. The student may then nod and even reply "Thank you" in courtesy return. But the native speaker knows that the bus driver may be expressing sarcasm with all the paralinguistic elements of courtesy at the surface level.

For these reasons -- the divergence in intuitive knowledge, semantic knowledge and cultural knowledge between the ESL student and the native speaker -- I feel that the Developmental English class is not the place for the ESL student. His needs in the cognitive, semantic and cultural levels in English skills are not the same as the needs of the native speaker in the Developmental English class.

The teacher who has both types of student in one class faces a choice of two educational objectives. He can work on the problems of the Developmental student and avoid the problems of the ESL student, who then continues to need remedial help. Or he can work from the point of view of the ESL student, to the detriment of the Developmental student who does not need to learn Subject-Verb-Object order, or question formation, or placement of attributive adjectives or the concepts of the use of the article with mass/non-mass nouns.

It seems clear that the school should place ESL students in separate classes to attain proficiency in English.

I would now like to approach the second part of my question on the needs assessment of ESL students.

How shall these students be taught?

First of all, I think the answer to this question is in ESL teacher training. The teacher should have certification in a program designed to meet the special needs of the ESL student. Teacher training in an ESL program should encompass two areas:

1. Methodology with broad bases in Linguistics, Education and English
2. Culture

Our approach to methodology should include a background in linguistics for better understanding of structures of other languages and the problems of first language interference. At the same time, linguistics gives us a better understanding of English structure. Training in phonology also is of first importance if we are to teach spoken English. Additionally, courses in education enrich our concepts and presentations.

The ESL teacher should also have a feeling for the immense resources and versatility of our language. We transmit our love of language to our students.

HOW DO WE BEGIN

We can begin with a review of basic sentence patterns in English. We work on agreement, case forms, position of modifiers, verb forms, pronoun reference, subordination, usage, all this as part of syntactical patterning.

In reading and writing we work to equip students with specific skills and we synthesize those skills. We teach relationships of classification, comparison/contrast, cause/effect. We teach the meaning and use of transitional markers. We teach the power of figures of speech, metaphor and analogy.

We can go beyond our required text to the world around us. We can take key issues like abortion and look for generalization and fact. We can read the college newspaper and analyze articles on ecology and nuclear power.

We can talk about semantics and the power of words. We bring in advertising and talk about stereotyping, propaganda, connotation and denotation. We can bring in articles on other cultures -- articles on Chinese moon-cakes and an 84-year old Japanese jogger. We discuss other ideas and values.

CULTURE

The ESL teacher must be aware of other cultures and

different perceptions of teacher-student expectations. Should the teacher be a guide or a model or an authority figure? Do we see the student as passive, a "tabula rasa", or as a participatory figure in the classroom? Our own attitudes determine the climate of the classroom. We can reduce anxieties by being sympathetic, warm, friendly. We should be sensitively aware of inhibitions of other world perceptions different from our own.

At the same time we should be aware that in the classroom experience we may be the first and possibly the only regular contact our student has with Americans. In a sense, we not only teach basic skills, we also represent our culture. Our student will see this country in the way we present it to him.

As teachers of foreign students we have the responsibility of explaining the issues our student finds in our society. Our student will ask about the women's movement, environmental control, affirmative action. As Americans and teachers, we have the responsibility of explaining those principles, foundational to this country, which give us the right of redress on those issues.

Our goal in working with foreign students is to work through induction to make discovery. Our goal is for our student to learn not the single concept but the connection of that concept to other disciplines,

and further, to a larger view. We are working to help our students develop critical skills to evaluate complex information. We are working to promote independent thinking in a world where words can blur and obscure crucial issues.

To my Japanese student who asks, "How could I find my way?" I would answer, "Your ESL classroom gives you the way. You can find your way from the ESL classroom to the world."

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